

Key Points

March 2003

Wetlands Reserve Program

- The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) at up to a total of 2,275,000 acres.
- The WRP is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.
- Currently there are 1,074,000 acres enrolled in the program. The 2002 Farm Bill authorized the continuation of the program by enabling the Secretary of Agriculture to enroll up to 250,000 additional acres annually into the program.
- Program funding comes through the Commodity Credit Corporation. Program implementation is handled by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
- The program achieves solutions to local community issues related to farms, ranches, rural lands, and other areas by establishing easements or long-term agreements on eligible lands.
- The goal of WRP is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. At least 70 percent of each project area will be restored to the original natural condition, to the extent practicable. The remaining 30 percent of each area may be restored to other than natural conditions.
- There are three program participation options: 10-year restoration cost-share agreements, 30-year conservation easements, and permanent easements.
- The Adjusted Gross Income provision of the 2002 Farm Bill impacts eligibility for WRP and several other 2002 Farm Bill programs. Individuals or entities that have an average adjusted gross income exceeding \$2.5 million for the three tax years immediately preceding the year the contract is approved are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments. However, an exemption is provided in cases where 75 percent of the adjusted gross income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations. The final rule for this provision has not yet been published.
- Landowners control access; non-developed recreational activities, such as hunting and fishing; and the right to lease recreational uses for financial gain. Other uses must be approved by NRCS. Approval is granted when the use is compatible with the program's wetland and wildlife conservation objectives.
- NRCS has enlisted support of conservation districts to assist with program delivery. Conservation districts provide leadership in convening local work groups, assist with identifying resource objectives, and provide recommendations regarding program priorities and eligible practices.
- NRCS works with other National and State level conservation entities to assist with program delivery, including Ducks

Unlimited, California Waterfowl Association, Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy.

- Average project cost per acre is approximately \$1,100 for financial assistance. Average project size is approximately 177 acres.
- Enrolled lands are mostly high-risk agricultural lands located in flood prone areas and restored to wetlands. The type of wetlands being restored varies from floodplain forest, to prairie potholes, to coastal marshes. All States, except Alaska, have active projects. The top States in terms of enrollment are Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, California, Florida, Iowa, Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, and New York.

For More Information

If you need more information about WRP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>



Visit USDA on the Web at:
<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.